Authority Underhands: Writing, Reading and Touching in Augustan Poetry Books

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Abstract: Der Beitrag widmet sich der Inszenierung von Händen und ihrem den Autorfiguren bald willkommenen, bald unwillkommenen Kontakt mit der Papyrusrolle in der augusteischen Buchdichtung. Anhand Properz, Horaz und Ovid wird dargelegt, wie die Referenz auf alltägliche Medienhandlungen aufgrund vielschichtiger kultureller Konnotationen des Begriffs der ‚Hand' spezifisches metapoetisches und -mediales Potenzial entwickelt.

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Authority Underhand: Writing, Reading and Touching in Augustan Poetry Books

1 Introduction

Both the creation and reception[1] of ancient written literature involved almost constant physical contact of human hands with the material text. In the case of the book roll in the context of Roman elegiac poetry,[2] the medial form which is at the centre of this paper,[3] haptic practice is quite well documented for reading. While there must have been reading table constructions,[4] the iconography of paintings[5] and statues—in particular from Pompeii and Herculaneum—mostly depict readers holding the two ends of the roll fully, with one hand at each end (fig. 1; fig. 2).[6] For self-confident posing, representing status and poetic interests, the closed roll could be presented in one (fig. 3) or two hands, placed directly under the chin.[7] For the techniques of writing on book rolls, however, there is little visual evidence.[8] It can be assumed that the non-writing

1 The paper focuses on the artefacts, agents and practices of Roman book culture. On the question of which different media settings of text experience (co-)existed, see Hutchinson 2008, 35–39; Parker 2009 (emphasis on the book); Wiseman 2015 (emphasis on orality and performance).

2 Generally on the book roll, see Blanck 1992, 75–86; Kenyon 1951, 40–74; Capasso 1995; Birt 1882, 1907. The sensibility of Birt 1907, 37 for the gestures of book handling is notable: "Ist doch das Halten des Buchs eine erweiterte Gebärdensprache, die der sorgfältigen Interpretation bedarf." On poetry books see Birt 1882, 289–307; Santirocco 1980; Van Sickle 1980; Fantham 1996, 63–67; Hutchinson 2008, esp. 21–31; Wulfram 2008, 137–152. Kenney 1982, 3–4 points out the restricted surviving evidence for Roman books and urges caution when it comes to analogies between ancient and modern practices.

3 This contribution originates in the wider context of my on-going project on media self-reflection in Propertius, undertaken at the University of Zurich. For their input and support I would like to thank especially Tom Phillips, Christian Ritter and Raphael Schwitter, and all the participants of the Materiality Workshop in Zurich 2016.

4 Cf. Birt 1907, 175–181. See also Wood 2001, 26 on luxurious papyrus-roll winders: "These objects are probably designed to hold open a book roll, freeing the reader's hands and sparing the delicate papyrus from excess handling."

5 Cf. Birt 1907, especially 113–123 and 162–166; Meyer 2009 extensively on the staging of writing and reading instruments in Campanian wall paintings.

6 Cf. Meyer 2009, 579 on pictures of reading women in the style of Attic vase paintings: "[...] the scroll characteristically falls in a graceful curve between the holder's two hands, rendering any writing on the scroll hard to read for the woman but making the curve of the scroll an elegant element of the composition."

7 On fig. 3, see McDonnell 1996, 469ff. and 491, pointing out the prestige created by posing with book roll, tablet and stylus. Another good example: Neapel, Museo Archeologico Naz., Inv. Nr. 9085, more in Birt 1907, 115–116.

8 Cf. Birt 1907, 197–209.

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hand was used to clutch one or even two ends of the papyrus. The occupied hand might have touched sideways too, certainly touching the *calamus* that was touching the roll.[9] As in fig. 4,[10] it is evident that all these fingers and palms did not necessarily belong to the entities we call the "author" (the person who composed the text in the first place) or the "recipient" (the person experiencing the text in the first place). In ancient media practice, both the writing down and reading out of poetic texts—as well as the silent holding of books—were tasks generally delegable, mostly to professionals.[11]

Fig. 1: Neapel, Museo Archeologico Naz., VIII.2.39 Inv. Nr. 8838 (Detail) (taken from: Ana Belén Cantero Paz; CC BY-SA 2.0).

9 Cf. Blanck 1992, 68–71 on writing postures.

10 A mythological reading scene: See Mau 1900, 301: "Links sitzen Admet und Alcestis; ihnen gegenüber der Bote, aus einer Papyrusrolle das verhängnisvolle Orakel vorlesend […]."

11 On professional readers (*anagnostae*/*lectores*) see Parker 2009, 199–200; Fondermann 2017a. On private reading see Parker 2009, 195–198 and Hartmann 2015, 712–714. On professional and private writing see below section 3 with footnotes.

Fig. 2: Neapel, Museo Archeologico Naz., Inv. Nr. 9072 (Detail) (taken from: Wikisource; Public Domain).

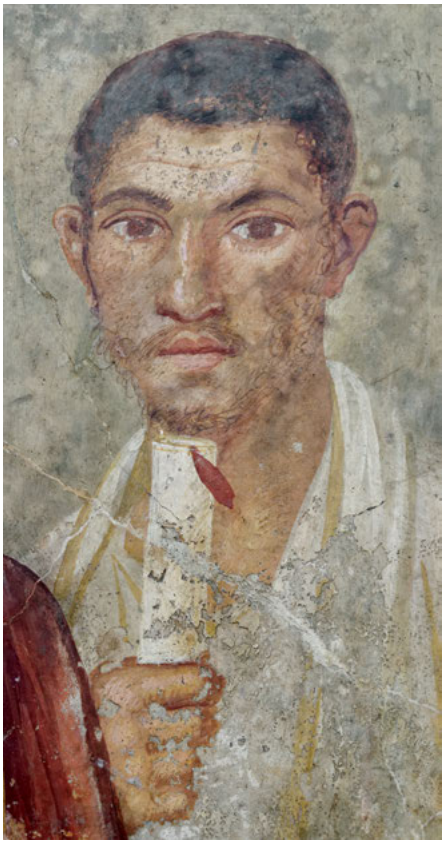

Fig. 3: Neapel, Museo Archeologico Naz., VII.2.6 Inv. Nr. 9058 (Detail) (taken from: Wikisource; Public Domain).

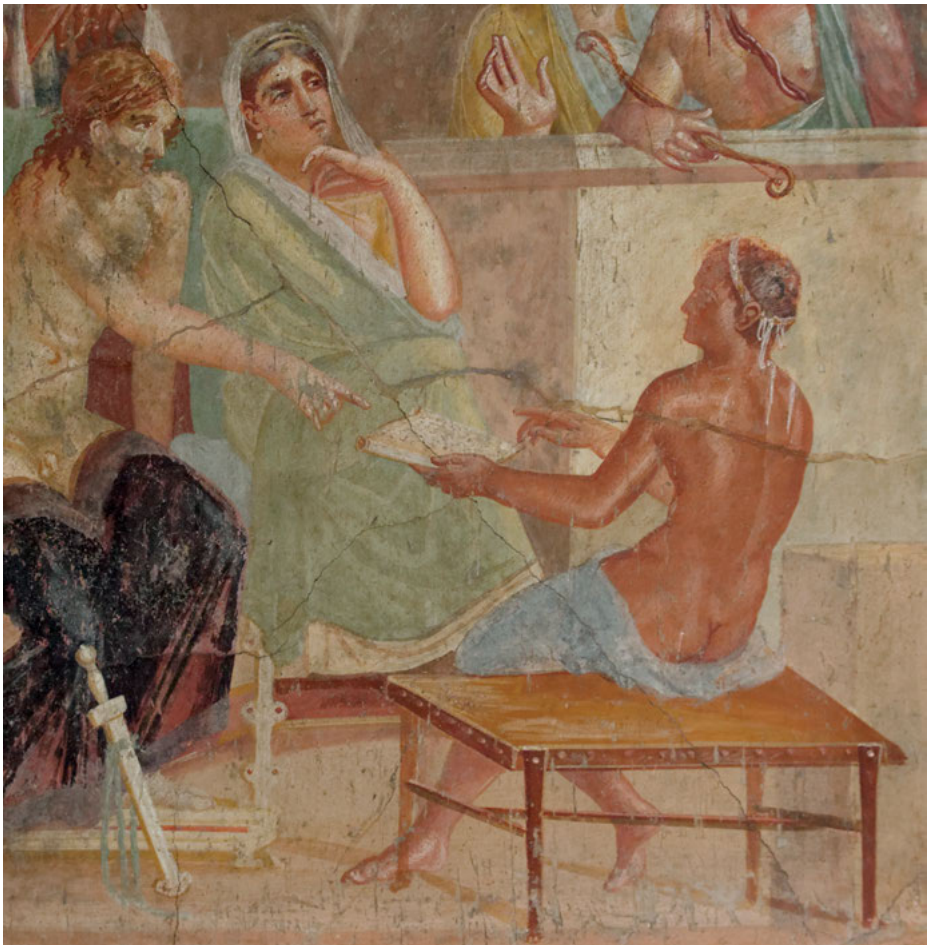

Fig. 4: Neapel, Museo Archeologico Naz., Inv. Nr. 9026 (Detail) (taken from: Wikisource; Public Domain).

The gestures of both writing and reading are small and very common. They must have been performed endlessly on a daily basis among certain privileged social groups participating in the developing Roman literary culture, where the poetry book can be understood as "in some sense the key to the new form and power of poetry in the Augustan age".[12] The physical handling of book rolls, but also of related media forms like papyrus sheets or wax tablets, is also variously referred to as a detail of fictional

12 Fantham 1996, 64. Generally on Roman literary culture see also Johnson/Parker (eds.) 2009 and Harris 1989. On the late republic and principate see Fantham 1996, 20–125; Harris 1989, 175–284; Citroni 2009.

every-day situations in the Augustan poetry collections—from Propertius' elegies to Horace's epistles and satires, to Ovid's works of the two first genres.

However, I would like to argue that the staging of both reading and writing hands—as intimate and strange, obliging and autonomous, unclean and chaste—exceeds the mere depiction of day-to-day media routine. The point of my contribution is to understand the hands as vehicles, or what's more as agents acting in the "project of self-definition and self-positioning",[13] the endeavour of poetic and especially media self-reflection that is noted as typical of Augustan poetry in small forms.[14] The usually very short scenes of writing ("Schreibszenen"[15]), reading and touching offer particular literary potential. First, the representation of the human body engaging with the material text creates intense, metaleptic linkages between the world(s) in and around the text. It engages the haptic, sensomotoric experience of every potential reader (who will also sometimes have been a writer), again and again, in the very moment of his or her reading.[16] Second, the literary imagination of touching hands enables authors, but also readers, to discuss specific aspects of the production, distribution and reception of poetry in books. A pivotal moment of reflection I would like to emphasize in the following is how the text should (or should not) be handled, and who should (or should not) lay hands on it—both literally and figuratively.

The paper starts with a closer look at the cultural meaning of the touching hand beyond the context of literary practices, focusing on the performance of legal, social and economic authority (2.). Subsequently, one main section of the paper is dedicated to the poetic staging of writing as expression of an author's unique touch (3.), while another section examines the oscillating imagery of hands as a potentially problematic body part involved in both the physical and mental experiencing of poetry (4.). The paper will conclude with some prospective thoughts focussing on further zones and fluids of the body in contact with the papyrus (5.).

13 Roman 2014, 14.

14 Cf. extensive Lowrie 2009, e. g. vii: "Literature's ability to form reality is figured in this period trough the way literature represents its own media of representation [...]." See also Roman 2014 and Wulfram 2008. A number of shorter studies on selected authors and works is quoted in my following discussions; see also section IV in this volume. On Martial, adapting, transforming and extending the figures of Augustan poetic self-awareness, see Fowler 1995; Roman 2001; especially Rimell 2006 focusing on "touching and mixing" in the first book of epigrams, with pp. 93–98 on hands and their impacts.

15 The concept of "Schreibszene"/"Schreib-Szene" aims at the self-reflection of writing as a precarious, heterogeneous ensemble of language, instrumentality and gesture (Campe 1991, esp. 760; adapted "Leseszene"/"Lese-Szene" in Müller-Wille 2017, 41ff.).

16 On the meanings of the haptic in Horace's *Odes*, see Tom Phillips in this volume; for Martial, Helmut Krasser discusses the interplay of book format and forms of intimacy in between author, text and reader.

2 Meanings of *manus*

Grasping it, in order to read or write on it: this is what it could mean to lay hands on a book roll literally, as a very common gesture in the repertoire of everyday media practice. Then again, in a broader context of Roman culture, the touching hand also creates strong connotations.[17] A central semantic field of *manus* is titled by the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae "De potestate"* ("concerning authority"), highlighting *manus* as a legal term in the sense of *de potestate paterna vel maritali vel domini*:[18] authority exercised by fathers, husbands or masters. To denote various forms of power that are diachronically and intersectionally constitutive of Roman society,[19] the Latin language refers to the human hand with its fundamental physical property to reach and hold not only material things but also living beings. The differentiated collection of legal terminology, particularly in relation to the omnipresent institution of slavery, like *mancipatio, mancipium, manumissio* etc.[20] demonstrate that the linguistic sign '*manus*', the physical hand and the performance of authority must have been understood as tightly interwoven.[21] Alfred Manigk explains the interconnection from the perspective of Roman law, underlining the impact of common language usage:

> Die umfassende juristische Bedeutung von M.[*anus*] und ihr Vorkommen in zahlreichen formalen Rechtsakten auch des Vermögensrechts – vgl. etwa XII Tafeln tab. VI 5 [...] als Handsymbol bei Erwerb und Geltendmachung von Rechten, – beruht auf dem allgemeinen Sprachgebrauch, gemäß dessen M. auch für Gewalt, Herrschaft, Macht und Besitz steht.[22]

17 See Rico 2010 generally on the hand as an archetypal symbol in literature, on antiquity see 166–172, esp. 166: "force est de constater que dès l'époque gréco-romaine, la main se distingue, tant par son employ polysémique que par sa dimension symbolique [...]."

18 Bulhart 1936–1966, 352.

19 Generally see Manigk 1930, esp. 1377–1384: "Dieser Ausdruck bezeichnet ursprünglich nicht nur das zwischen dem Hausvater und den Kindern bestehende Gewaltverhältnis, die *patria potestas*, sondern die Hausgewalt, Herrschaft und Autorität schlechthin." Furthermore, Manigk points out that in ancient Greek, Germanic and Oriental law terminology too, the word for the hand was engaged to describe this kind of authority (p. 1377). As Manthe 2017, 1855ff. and Manigk 1930, 1377 explain, *mancipatio* and *manumissio* could also be exercised on (grand-)children and wives.

20 Cf. Fest. p. 115, 137, 149 Lindsay and Varro *ling*. 6,85. See Kunkel 1928, 1007 (*mancipatio*) and Steinwenter 1928, 987 (*manceps*) on etymologies. On *mancipatio* and *mancipium* see Manthe 2017, esp. 1854 on the ritual touching in the performance of delivery: "Die Übereignung einer *res mancipi* geschah durch ein altertümliches Ritual, wobei der Erwerber in Gegenwart von 5 mündigen römischen Bürgern und eines Waagehalters die Sache anfasste, festgelegte Worte sprach, mit einem Kupferstück an die Waage schlug und dieses dann dem Veräußerer übergab [Gai. *inst*. 1,119]." On *manumissio*, see Lamberti 2017.

21 See Rico 2010, 169 on the complex meanings of *manus* still traceable in modern languages like the French:"[...] on est bien forcé de recconaître qu'il est possible qu'une manipulation d'ordre manuel peut, dans le jeu des connotations, se transformer en une *manipulation* d'ordre mentale ou psychique."

22 Manigk 1930, 1378.

When considering the idea of the touching hand as embedded in sign-related and especially text-related media constellations, we can think of the ancient practices of sealing and signing artefacts, particularly inscribed ones. Several distinct handprints and fingerprints have been found on Roman tiles that might document a wordless technique of leaving very personal marks.[23] Such imprints are likely to be considered attempts at manual authentication and—at least temporary—appropriation, since ancient sealing probably began with the impressing of fingers, fingernails or personal accessories.[24] As will be discussed further below, in private letter writing to "close relatives [...], intimate friends [...], social superiors [...], and persons one wanted to flatter" the writing of one's very own hand was trusted to transmit sincerity.[25] When it comes to official documents from sacral to legal contexts, the personal signature was definitely known by the 2nd century AD, locating unique authenticity and authority in writing *sua manu*.[26]

Augustan poetry reflects, and notoriously suspends, the practices of legal institutions and mechanisms of social hierarchies, as a way to negotiate the cultural framework the authors and their work are situated in.[27] For them, questions of "Gewalt, Herrschaft, Macht und Besitz" ("power, domination, authority and possession")[28] could be a rather practical issue, as they faced the challenges of the intensified production, distribution and reception of written texts, especially of collections intended to circulate in certain arrangements. Once shared with their readers or listeners, it was impossible to fully control again the circulation of the books and poems,[29] the contexts of their reception, their exact wording, arrangement, material design, authorial attribution and very interpretation. New media habits, new concepts of self-confident authorship and an expanding literary scene with corresponding social and economical structures could at the same time raise new insecurities—and thereby new figurations of literary self-representation. Hartmut Wulfram points out for Horace's epistle

23 Such tiles have been found at Brading Roman Villa, Isle of Wight (picture: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/alkGH4JcQfGjGL61edjRCw (last accessed: 24.02.2018)); in Greta Bridge, Durham; Silchester (Insula III), Hampshire; Chedworth Roman Villa, Gloucestershire. On fingerprints and archaeology see Cummins 1941 and Åström/Eriksson 1980.

24 See Giele/Oschema/Panagiotopoulos 2015, 555 and Wenger 1923, 2383.

25 McDonnell 1996, 474.

26 See Kübler 1931, 498ff.

27 Here I think of the tropes of *servitium amoris* and *militia amoris*, or of reflections of marriage and adultery, gift exchanges and *amicitia* etc.

28 Again Manigk 1930, 1378.

29 See Kenney 1982, 10ff. and 15ff., esp. 19: "In antiquity there were no copyright laws and no legal safeguards against unauthorized copying and circulation of books: therefore there was no such thing as publication in anything like its modern sense. [...] Once a book was released in this way the author had no rights in it whatever (even before publication what rights he had were moral rather than legal), no control over its fate, and no secure prospect of being able to correct it." See also Starr 1987; Iddeng 2006, esp. 64 preferring the expression "release" to "publish".

books: "Durch den Rekurs auf das Instrument der Buchrolle verliert ein antiker Autor unausweichlich jegliche Übersicht und Kontrollmöglichkeit über sein Publikum. Horaz ist sich dieser Tatsache vollkommen bewußt."[30] Ellen Oliensis, William Fitzgerald, Joseph Farrell and other scholars have discussed fruitfully how suggestive poetic imagery "translates real anxieties associated with the act of publication" by revolving around erotic relationships and prostitution,[31] but also around dependencies within the systems of the Roman *familia* and *amicitia*.[32] It is within this major cluster of fantasies about literary media practice and authority in Augustan poetry that I would like to investigate the particular motif of *manus*. With its unavoidable presence in every day media practice and its culturally deeply rooted literal and figurative meanings, the touching hand is a very suitable figure with which represent on-going reflections on poetry, mediality and materiality.

3 Writing: The Personal Touch

Catullus's *lepidus libellus*, on the verge of making its way from the author to a potential readership, is an early and formative fiction of a Roman poetry book as a material creation.[33] Although in *Carmen* 1 special emphasis is put on the instrument (Catull. 1,2: *arida … pumice*) and result (1: *lepidum*; 2: *expolitum*) of high-end book production, suggesting that the polishing stone was removed just seconds ago (2: *modo*), no human agency is mentioned. The small new book is presented as almost magically

30 Wulfram 2008, 92.

31 Oliensis 1995, 215. Hutchinson 2008, 32 explains already for the late republic: "The antagonism and drama of literature making its public appearance forms a topic inherited from the Hellenistic period and earlier; but the intensity of accounts in letters, poems, and treatises must correspond to some reality." See also Karagianni/Schwindt/Tsouparopoulou 2015, 41 on the paradoxical imagination of threatened books in a blooming book culture.

32 Oliensis 1995 (Horace); Fitzgerald 1992 (Catullus); Farrell 2009 (Catullus; Horace; Vergil); Farrell 1998 (Ovid); Fear 2000 (Ovid; Propertius); Mordine 2010 (Ovid); Newlands 1997 (Ovid); Wulfram 2008, 90–93 (Horace). For Martial, Williams 2002, 151 underlines the "language of *control* and *domination*" in the sexual imagery and Rimell 2006, 97 points out: "Martial's city interknits the vocabulary and imagery of reading, writing, publication and slavery, all of which involve acquisitive, violent, or caressing hands […]."

33 On Catull. 1 see Fitzgerald 1992, 420ff. with a reading of the book polishing as an erotic and meta-media fiction; Farrell 2009, 166ff. on the perfection of Catullus' *libellus* in contrast to the material precarity of real copies; Feeney 2012, 34ff. on the problematisation of poetic reference. Karagianni/Schwindt/Tsouparopoulou 2015, 43 link the imagination of material (im)perfection with questions of authority: "[…] vielmehr bewahrt der Dichter auch *post festum* die Spuren und Risse der Hervorbringung des Werkes und sichert damit vielleicht zugleich den Anspruch und die Hoffnung, in diesen Prozess auch dann noch eingreifen zu können, wenn der Schritt von der Produktion zur Rezeption gegangen und das Werk aus des Verfassers Händen in die Verfügung erst durch seinen Adressaten, dann durch seine Leser gelangt ist."

perfect and pristine forever; not yet offered, not yet accepted. In the sixth poem of Vergil's *Eclogues*, a later collection of Roman poetry refined in any way, the tension between a strong reference to the realities of text production (*praescripsit*; *pagina*) and the image of a strangely autonomous (*sibi*) artefact occurs again (Verg. *ecl.* 6,11–12): [...] *nec Phoebo gratior ulla est / quam sibi quae Vari praescripsit pagina nomen*. Later, Propertius again introduces his *libelli* in the prelude of book 2 as literally self-written (Prop. 2,1,1: *quaeritis unde mihi totiens scribantur amores*), and operates at the same prominent position in book 3 with a variation of the detached Catullan *pumex* and its impact on a personified verse (Prop. 3,1,8): *exactus tenui pumice versus eat*. It is against the backdrop of this kind of book imagery that a set of other passages by Propertius and Ovid is worth addressing,[34] as they stress the presence of hands marking and making the text—the hands of author-figures.

Propertius 3,23 is well known for its media self-consciousness:[35] The elegiac ego laments the loss of his writing tablets, which shift between an instrument for erotic communication and poetic notes (2: *scripta ... bona*; 6: *verba diserta*). In the last verses, the whole poem itself pretends to be something like a lost notice (23: *citus haec aliqua propone columna*) for the lost *tabellae*:[36]

Ergo tam doctae nobis periere tabellae,
scripta quibus pariter tot periere bona!
Has quondam nostris manibus detriverat usus,
qui non signatas iussit habere fidem.
Illae iam sine me norant placare puellas
et quaedam sine me verba diserta loqui.
[...]
Me miserum, his aliquis rationem scribit avaru<s>
et ponit duras inter ephemeridas!
Quas si quis mihi rettulerit, donabitur auro:
Quis pro divitiis ligna retenta velit?
I puer, et citus haec aliqua propone columna,
et dominum Esquiliis scribe habitare tuum![37]

34 Lucil. 798 reminds us of the now lost poetry collections. As an example of an early hands-on scene, the *glutinator* at work seems to be addressed: *praeterito tepido, glutinator, glutino*.

35 On Prop. 3,23 see Heyworth (2018); Meyer 2001, 207ff.; Pelling 2002; Roman 2006, 359–366. See also Phillips 2011 on book imagery in Prop. 1,18 and 3,15–17.

36 Cf. Heyworth (2018) on the changing representations of writing with the tablets as a "physical object" and "symbol for his [Propertius'] whole poetic output", and with the public notice in the end of the poem. See Pelling 2002, 173 on the last distich "not merely as—of course—a parody of real-life lost-and-found notices, but as a gesture of publication" and Roman 2006, 361 on the "more unambiguosly literary identity" of the tablets compared to the ones in Catull. 42.

37 For the text of Propertius in the following: Fedeli 2006.

> So my accomplished tablets are lost then, and so much splendid writing lost with them! Long usage at my hands had worn them down and bade them, though unsealed, be credited as mine. They had by now learned how to mollify girls in my absence, and in my absence utter some persuasive phrases. [...] Oh dear! Now some profiteer is writing his accounts on them and filing them with his pitiless ledgers. If anyone returns them to me, I shall reward him with gold: who would keep wood when he might have wealth? Go, slave, and quickly post this notice on some pillar, and write that your master lives on the Esquiline.[38]
> (Prop. 3,23)

In lines 3–4, the emphasis on the impact of the poet-lover's touch is significant: his very own fingers (*nostris manibus*) have changed the materiality of the robust text carrier through its constant use (*usus*) in the past (*quondam*). *Deterere* has a quite profane, also pejorative ring and refers to a touch damaging the object for mundane necessities beyond itself. Linking the passage to ancient media realities, one is invited to picture the smoothing, scratching and staining of the surface and corners of a simple wooden tablet (8: *vulgari buxo*; 22: *ligna*). These traces are highlighted as highly individual, as equivalent to a seal: although the tablets are *non signatae* (5), they have absolutely (4: *iussit*) earned the trust (4: *habere fidem*) of their user(s). The detailed material fiction refers to the sealing of letters on wooden tablets and on papyrus. As mentioned above, this manual technique served to secure a text's authenticity, authority and integrity through individual marks,[39] and it was practised centuries and centuries before the personal signature was established.

While it is important to register the non-verbal character of the writer's vestiges, we have in Prop. 4,3 and in *Heroides* 15, attributed to Ovid, another two internal authors claiming that their hands do leave highly personal markings on the material text, now explicitly through writing. In the first example, Propertius' female protagonist Arethusa, preparing a letter to her husband at war, explains her blurred scribbling as a manifestation of lethal lovesickness:

Haec Arethusa suo mittit mandata Lycotae,
cum totiens absis, si potes esse meus.
Si qua tamen tibi lecturo pars oblita derit,
haec erit e lacrimis facta litura meis:
aut si qua incerto fallet te littera tractu,
signa meae dextrae iam morientis erunt.

38 For the translation of Propertius in the following: Goold 1990.

39 See Giele/Oschema/Panagiotopoulos 2015, 558 on the basic functions of sealing: "Das Siegeln erfüllte vielerlei Funktionen, wobei pragmatisch wohl die Sicherung der *Authentizität*, die *Beglaubigung* sowie die *Unversehrtheit* eines Behältnisses (Verplombung) dominieren [...]." See Wenger 1923, 2394ff. on the sealing of letters on wax and papyrus. Looking at the signature as conceptualized by Derrida 1988, 19–21 these lines invite their readers to think about the claimed, but problematic uniqueness of the poetic text: it promises to be singular but then again consists of common, repeated signs and circulates in the media form of copied books. I thank Tom Phillips for hinting in this direction.

> Arethusa to her Lycotas sends this letter, if in spite of your frequent absences you can count as mine. But if when you read it any portion is smudged and missing, such a blot will have been caused by my tears; or if the unclear outline of any letter baffles you, this will be a sign that death was even now upon my hand.
> (Prop. 4,3,1–6)

Like in 3,23, the hand's impact is staged again as distinctive (*signa mea dextrae*), and again as rather deforming to the aesthetics of the material text (*incerto … tractu*). Trust is once more at stake in the media constellation of the elegiac world, but now to be guaranteed through untrustworthiness, as the very illegibility of the letters (*fallet te littera*) ensures the writer's emotional and erotic sincerity. Sappho then, writing within the fiction of Ov. *epist*. 15, eagerly hopes to be identified as the proud sender of a small *opus*. This is supposed to happen through the style of her *dextra studiosa*, a probably also visibly (*adspecta*; *oculis*) well-trained hand. The prompt (*ut …*; *protinus*) recognition value of the autograph is presumed strong enough to compete playfully with the information given by the author's name (*auctoris nomina*):

> *Ecquid, ut adspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,*
> *protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis?*
> *An, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,*
> *hoc breve nescires unde veniret opus?*[40]

> Tell me, when you looked upon the characters from my eager right hand, did your eye know forthwith whose they were—or, unless you had read their author's name, Sappho, would you fail to know whence these brief words come?[41]
> (Ov. *epist*. 15,1–4)

If we read these three small scenes as what they pretend to be, as descriptions of the drafting of private messages on wax tablets or papyrus sheets, they do in principle fit the media historical evidence as presented by Myles McDonnell and Tiziano Dorandi. Privileged Romans, as the protagonists of Augustan literary scene along with their fictional heroines are likely to have been, probably did not have to write much with their own hands—unless they wanted to. Trained *librarii* and other scribes were, literally, always at hand to do any kind of writing, from taking down dictations to copying text.[42] However, as McDonnell underlines: "There were in fact good reasons for a Roman public man to write in his own hand: secrecy, decorum, convenience and efficiency."[43] Sometimes the personal touch was required for a note or a whole letter in

40 For the text of the *Heroides* in the following: Dörrie 1971.

41 For the translation of the *Heroides* in the following: Showerman 1977.

42 McDonnell 1996, 470 explains: "[…] in the ancient world, slaves served many of the functions of modern technology". On professional writers see Fondermann 2017d; Kleberg 1967, 29–37; Winsbury 2009, 80–82.

43 McDonnell 1996, 475. On the handwriting of upper-class women, see McDonnell 1996, 476. See Hartmann (forthcoming) on writing in Roman "day-to-day practice".

order to express authenticity, affection and presence through the employment of the sender's very own hand. There are references to such practice in Cicero's correspondence and, still visible and tangible, in the *subscriptiones* on the wood tablets from Vindolanda.[44] Similarly, Propertius' allusions to poetic autography may also seem rather unremarkable: it is possible that first drafts of literary texts or at least notes and excerpts were written down by the author's hand, probably on the kind of simple *tabellae* as acted out in elegy 3,23.[45]

Yet if we take account of the specific media setting within which most Roman readers must have actually received poems such as the examples above, the emphasis on the 'personal touch' gains meaning significantly. This writing about very personal writing must have been experienced, firstly, through texts which belonged to the system of poetic communication, potentially addressing a multitude of readers, beyond certain social relationships with a dedicating author. Secondly, it was mostly experienced through book rolls, ideally complete and professionally styled, from the choice and preparation of the papyrus to the ornate lettering, mise-en-page and accessories.[46] Thirdly, what's most important here, these texts were most probably copied from copies of copies of what (eventually) once was a first exemplar, maybe actually touched by the author himself. In other words, when reading in Prop. 4,3 about the uniquely imperfect *signa meae dextrae* with all their intimate implications, one would read these very words through the multisensorial encountering of perfected verbal and non-verbal traces that were definitely not left by the loving hands of Arethusa.[47] It is also very likely that the traces would also not be left exclusively for the reader by the hands of a certain popular poet—but certainly left by the intense involvement of many hands gluing, hammering, polishing, storing, trading, inscribing, adorning, presenting the book roll.[48] It seems these were mostly anonymous hands, most likely

44 See McDonnell 1996, 474–476. On handwritten closures in the Vindolanda tablets see Bowman/Thomas 1983, 50, referring to Tablets No. 248, 250, 295 and 346. Cf. Tablets 291, 292 and 293 for female handwriting.

45 See McDonnell 1996, 473–474 on manuscripts made by authors of speeches and literary texts. Dorandi 1991, 14–17 discusses authorial dictation, but also the possibility of authorial autography on pp. 17–24; on the use of wooden tablets see p. 31. See Meyer 2001, 201ff. on wooden tablets in epistolary communication and Meyer 2009, 571ff. on paintings of tablets in legal and economic contexts, but also as part of the staging of poetic *otium* on pp. 579–587.

46 Cf. Schafer 2017, 135–136 on the appearance of a perfect exemplar: "The best papyrus will have been procured, the most accomplished *librarius* engaged; after the ink had dried, the cut-edges will have been smoothed out with pumice and possibly dyed, and the papyrus treated with cedar oil. A *titulus* identifying the work will have been attached, the roll fixed to an *umbilicus* (roller) and enclosed in a *membrana* (vellum wrapper): all of these will have been beautiful and sumptuous." See Schafer 2017 on mise-en-page; Ishøy 2003 and 2006 on lettering and other features; Wood 2001 on roll-winders.

47 See Phillips 2011, 109–110 on the forceful "interplay between fictional and real inscriptions" (p. 110) in Prop. 1,18.

48 On book production see Birt 1882, 223–251 and Kenyon 1951, 48ff.; on book trade see extensive Kleberg 1967, 22–68; Blanck 1992, 120–129; Winsbury 2009, 57–66. On the many further roles of slaves

of un-free or freed workers, hands with hardly any prestige attached and no social "fingerprint" of their own.[49] Although a Roman poet is likely to have written *sua manu* in situations related to his literary projects, the copying of a manuscript was considered as a "drudgery"[50] and unthinkable as an activity for a well-educated and socially established Roman.

Fictional Autography in Tangible Books

In the selected passages, I argue, Propertius and Ovid blur the fictional autography of letter-writing and poetic drafting, including its specific conditions and connotations, with the realities of professional book production. These are materially—visually and haptically—evident to any potential reader in the very moment of experiencing the text. As Elizabeth A. Meyer puts it for literary references both on papyrus and on wax/wood as text carriers, "poetic lightness can play nicely on the shared medium".[51] The metamedial imagination enables the authors to literally keep a hold on the book(s) conveying and co-creating their poetry, and to literally stay in touch with every single one of their potentially innumerable readers—without taking on the both logistically and socially impossible task of endless book copying by their own hands.[52]

From this angle, the beginning of Prop. 3,23 can be understood as an auctorial fantasy of a singular quasi-sealed or sealed *libellus*, tightly interwoven with the erotic narrative. It conveys a highly confidential autograph of elegiac poetry in which no word could be changed, serving faithfully its purpose within literary communication (10: *effectus … bonos*) up to the degree of physical, even audible replacement of the absent author, facing a strangely multiple, attractive and learned readership (5–6): *Illae iam sine me norant placare puellas / et quaedam sine me verba diserta loqui*.[53]

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and freedman in book production and trading (*glutinatores*; *bibliopolae* etc.), see Fondermann 2017b and 2017c; Winsbury 2009, 79–85.

49 As pointed out in Fondermann 2017c, 440–442 and Winsbury 2009, 82–83, there must have been some prominent figures like Tiro and Tyrannio. See Rimell 2006, 94 on Mart. 1,101 featuring the figure of Demetrius: "The proprietorial *manus* at the beginning of book 1 becomes Martial's copyist at the closural 1,101 […]."

50 McDonnell 1996, 477. See also the discussion on pp. 477–486 on the term *describere*, understood in the sense not of "copy" but "cause to be copied" (p. 484). See also Birt 1907, 197–198, suggesting that writing on papyrus was not a theme suited for the visual self-presentation of the privileged.

51 Meyer 2001, 205.

52 Although, as I argue, the Augustan authors like to present themselves hands-on, it seems that for them an explicit scene of writing on their own *libellus* is not an option (cf. Hor. *sat*. 1,10,92 where the *puer* is commanded to write the book).

53 Roman 2006, 360–361 interprets the absence of a seal on the tablets and their independence from the sender as "recognition to the dynamics of origination and subsequent circulation inherent in the concept of literary authorship".

The touching hand and its impact (3: *nostris manibus*) make this miracle of mediation possible, standing in between *ego* (1: *nobis*), *scripta bona* (2) and the beguiled reader(s) (5). Propertius' particular interest in non-verbal marks might aim longingly at their level of uniqueness compared to alphabetic letters based on conventionality—a poetic vision of a perfectly intimate writing system beyond words. However, Propertius challenges his own media idyll, and by doing so reveals the tension between the desire for both control and circulation: not only through the frame narrative of having lost his ideal *tabellae-libellus* (possibly to a stranger's hands, see section 4 below) and through the staging of the text as loss note that "significantly no longer remains tied to the fiction of privacy",[54] but with an explicit reference to the writing of a *puer* in the final distich 23–24. In abrupt juxtaposition to the fiction of the author's handprints, a highly plausible media constellation comes into play: the external readers are confronted with another and very different internal writer, a nameless slave boy. As the sudden deictic *haec* refers not only to the narrated loss notice but also to the narrating *libellus* and the verses inscribed on it,[55] one is invited to picture this pragmatic (23: *citus*), probably masterly delegated and dictated (24: *dominum … scribe … tuum*)[56] touch of his or her own book roll. Other than the unique text carrier imagined in the poem, this very tangible artefact was probably purchased at a bookseller (23: *aliqua … columna*[57]), one of many copies, none of which would have had a seal or been "copyrighted" in the modern sense.

In Prop. 4,3, with Arethusa's letter, "Elegy [...] takes over another medium, and one strongly linked with a first person who is to be identified with the author."[58] Again, the metaleptic potential of *haec* is at work, together with "explicit references to the physical processes of writing and reading",[59] interlacing the elegiac scrawly letter with the neat poetry book in the reader's hands. On the one side, the staged ugliness of the handwriting (*incerto … tractu*; cf. *pars oblita*; *litura*),[60] the explicit disturbance of aesthetic conventions of book culture, can highlight the beauty and quality of the factual *libellus*—the author's both poetic and material composition, to be accessed ideally by an admiring reader, purchased through economical or symbolic expenses. On the other side, I read the passage as one more reflection on the problem of the insurmountable physical distance between author and reader(s). Just as Lycotas from Arethusa, the broader readership is far away from the poet at the moment of reading (*tibi lecturo*). The *absens* reader is in danger of being seduced by another (cf. 69: *incor-*

54 Roman 2006, 361.

55 Cf. Heyworth/Morwood 2011, 330 drawing a parallel to Hor. *sat*. 1,10,92.

56 Roman 2006, 362 reads the scene as an expression of the "power to produce and circulate a written document, which will carry out its author's will at distance".

57 Like in Hor. *ars* 373, *columna* can also refer to the stall of a book seller.

58 Hutchinson 2006, 100.

59 Wyke 2002, 93.

60 Cf. Heyworth (2018) and Rosenmeyer 1997, 34 on the "supposed illegibility" in the *Heroides*.

rupta mei conserva foedera lecti), instead of being *suus* (*suo*) and exclusively devoted to one single, sanctioned relationship with the sender. [61] If the both media and erotic constellation of the elegiac world mirrors the media and social constellation in the Roman "reality", a most impressive imaginative picture of the author is created: he himself is painfully writing every single line for every single reader, drenched with most sensual, femininely connoted affection and fidelity.[62] The poet's desire to communicate and to reach out to his audience is visualized as almost lethal, transferred through his shaking hand and, again through the traces (*signa mea dextrae iam morientis*)[63] left on the material object. Like in 3,23, the hand figures as an agent of transcendent mediation between author, text and reader. It is trusted to affect the materiality and the meaning of the text with an intensity that exceeds what the writing of mere letters on a papyrus can do.

The opening of Ov. *epist*. 15 projects another scene of female handwriting (and male reading), this time insisting on its visible high quality, linked with a confident claim for the literary standing of text and writer. Referring to a historical poetess and a historical oeuvre which is transmitted in book form, this poem pushes the notorious self-reflection of the *Heroides* collection further again.[64] As Joseph Farrell remarks, "the text dwells upon the issue of authorship"—with the right hand starring in the first lines.[65] Here the author's personal touch is imagined as immediately (*ut adspecta*; *protinus*) controlling the institutional recognition and attribution (*auctoris nomina*; *opus*)[66] of his work as a whole. It seems that a poet is pondering and expanding his, factually, quite restricted possibilities of making sure that any reader knows *unde veniret opus* ("where the work comes from"):[67] While autography was certainly not common, author and title could be indicated on the papyrus (3: *nisi legisses autoris nomen*) or on an added σίλλυβος[68] (see above fig. 2 and 3), potentially free to be omitted, lost or changed in the processes of distribution and transmission. In the light of

61 Cf. Lowrie 2009, 221: "Sexual possession and interpretability are elements of plenitude equally threatened by absence."

62 See Wyke 2002, 85–93 from a gender-oriented perspective.

63 Cf. Hutchinson 2006, 103: "The hand, on which attention is concentrated, is made to die itself as the person dies [...]."

64 On material fictions in the *Heroides*, see Farrell 1998; Rosenmeyer 1997 and 1996; Kiening 2008, 81.

65 Farrell 1998, 333.

66 Cf. Farrell 1998, 332–333. Phaedrus seems to go quite far too with the idea of his own authorial touch on the *opus* in 4,21,7–8: *sive hoc ineptum sive laudandum est opus, / invenit ille, nostra perfecit manus*.

67 Rosenmeyer 1997, 35 links the "toying with self-identification" to scenes of reading and writing in the exile poems.

68 On the σίλλυβος/*titulus* see Birt 1882, 66–67; Blanck 1992, 83–85. Meyer 2009, 577 mentions paintings with readable titles.

the precarious attribution of *epist*. 15 to Ovid,[69] the efforts of Sappho and her talented hand are especially interesting, since whoever composed the lines seemed to be aware of the challenge of identification and authority.

Between Personification and Alienation

To close this section, I would like to introduce another figure of media self-reflection engaging the autography motive: the paradoxical relation of the writing hand to the writer himself. In the first three selected passages, *manus* and *dextrae* were presented in perfect metonymic relations to the internal authors and their aims for presence through and control over the text. However, in *Pont*. 4,1, staged as a letter from the exiled author,[70] Ovid lets the union crack and reveals its asymmetrical, unstable and somehow disturbing nature. Here, the hand is said to misbehave quite often (*quotiens*), writing down exactly what it shouldn't:[71]

> *O, quotiens, alii cum vellem scribere, nomen*
> *rettulit in ceras inscia dextra tuum!*
> *Ipse mihi placuit mendis in talibus error,*
> *et vix invita facta litura manu est.*[72]
>
> Ah, how often, when I wished to write to another, my hand all unconsciously placed your name upon the wax! The very mistake I made in such slips gave me pleasure and my hand was scarce willing to make the erasure.[73]
> (Ov. *Pont*. 4,1,11–14)

In the first distich, a mental and physical separation is stressed. On the one side there is the poetic *ego* with his concrete but distanced writing intentions (*alii cum vellem scribere*), and on the other side there is the hand (*dextra*) immediately in touch with the text carrier (*ceras*), performing along another agenda (*rettulit*; n. b. the absence of possessive pronouns, as in Prop. 3,23,3 and 4,3,6). Of course, the alienation of the internal author's rebellious body part is softened with *inscia*: the hand is denied consciousness, which is the privilege of the thinking man. Or is it? The echoing *invita* in

69 On the transmission of *epist*. 15, see Farrell 1998, 330ff. Farrell shows for the *Heroides* in general "how the poems themselves thematize the question of authenticity in a way that anticipates and even presupposes much of the discussion to which they have been subjected" (p. 332).
70 See Wulfram 2008, 265 understanding the pictured text more as a draft than a letter, and p. 267 quoting *Pont*. 4,15,33ff. where not the hand but the letters are acting on their own will.
71 Cf. Ov. *epist*. 21: in vv. 29–30, the odd *nobis* after *meos digitos* seems to include the writer and her fingers as a suffering team. But in the end, the overworked hand revolts (247–248): *Iam satis invalidos calamo lassavimus artus / et manus officium longius aegra negat*. See also Ov. *epist*. 18,21–22.
72 For the text of Ovid's exile poems in the following: Owen 1951.
73 For the translation of Ovid's exile poems in the following: Wheeler 1996.

the following distich attributes an own and contrary will to the writing hand, rather underlined through *vix*: the writer finally masters his bodily instrument, making the hand correct her traces (*litura*). But at the same time he can't help himself noticing the strangeness of his domination. Looking at verse 13, the relationship turns out to be even more complex, as the hand's misbehaving is pictured as tightly connected with the internal author's secret wishes and thereby pleasing him (*mihi placuit … error*).

The personification of the writing hand, obviously, can be understood as deeply topical, entertaining and variegating feature. Yet, the tricky symbiosis of hand and man is also known as a productive concept in ancient thinking. It was engaged for reflections on human existence,[74] to distinguish human from animal life, but also to meditate on the complicated status of slaves as an extension of their masters, at the same time an instrument and a living being.[75] As in modern language use, *manus* could refer as a trope to workers doing their job subordinated to another's authority.[76] I suggest that the fantasy of the author's suspicious hand can also resonate with the media practice of professional scribes noting down masterly dictations of both private letters and literary texts, and multiplying the former in book production. As "right-hands" they too work as intermediary agents between author, text and reader.[77] Like the physical hands, they perform the tiring but crucial job of (re-)materialising the author's very words: maybe sometimes *inscii*, sometimes *inviti*, potentially making mistakes, never fully controllable and never fully dispensable.

Against this backdrop, the ambivalent, halfway identifying, halfway distancing glimpse of the author at his own writing hand can figure as the ambivalent glance at his own composing. The creation of poetic text is the result of complicated cognitive, emotional and also motoric processes which are performed partly consciously, partly unconsciously. Facing this, the question might arise as to how much an author can and must identify with his own work shaping up word by word and verse by verse. Physically, the hand is the furthest outpost of the poet; it is the fundamentally difficult interface ("Schnittstelle") where the intersection of the subject and the writing materials takes place.[78] From the perspective of modern philology, Stephan Kammer

74 See Ricklin 2010, 31ff. and Rico 2010, 168: "La main illustre, dans la plupart des cas, une constante relation symbiotique qui relie le bien et le mal […]."

75 See Ricklin 2010, 29, 34–37, esp. 34 on the expression ὄργανον πρὸ ὀργάνων referring both to hands and slaves. On the idea of slaves as *instrumentum vocale* see Fitzgerald 2000, 6ff.

76 Bulhart 1936–1966, 357–358: *De hominibus: I significantur homines, quorum opera alii* […] *utuntur tamquam operantes instrumento -uum* […]. *II significantur homines, quorum -uum opera imprimis requiritur (pars pro toto)* […]. Cf. Winsbury 2009, 82 on the term '*amanuensis*' for a professional writer.

77 See Fitzgerald 2000, 59–62 on the mediating character of the slave figures in Ov. *am.* 11–12, esp. p. 60 on the "constant slippage in this poem between tablets and maid, the two media of Ovid's message".

78 Lieb/Ott 2016 investigate the concept of "Schnittstellen" in between humans and inscribed artefacts in medieval poetry. Drawing on Huber 2005, they are interested in the general incommensurability of the two systems of the human body and the inscription, and in the poetic reflections of these tensions (p. 266–267). See also Kammer 2006, 133.

reflects the hand as a "poetological problem zone":[79] "Immer aber handelt solche poetologische Reflexion von der Problematik der Grenzziehung und -überschreitung: Gehört die Hand [...] noch zum Körper oder schon zur Schrift? Ist sie noch Werkzeug oder verfolgt sie schon eigene Absichten? [...] Wer/was schreibt?".[80] Oscillating between instrument and body part, the hand emerges as a poetic vehicle fit for ideas of both auctorial detachment and attachment—especially in generic contexts where the expansive calling of muses and gods is not really an option.

4 Reading: Please (Don't) Touch

In this second main section we turn to scenes of touching within the distribution and reception of literary texts, respectively of texts that toy with the 'literariness' of book poetry. Another glimpse at the Roman genealogy of the hand motif suggests that this time, Catullus explicitly includes human touch in his strong visions of the *libellus*. In fragmented *Carmen* 14b, he pictures his future readers to reach out courageously for his poetic trifles (1–3): *Si qui forte mearum ineptiarum / lectores eritis manusque vestras / non horrebitis admovere nobis.* It seems that the reference to this aspect of media practice, to benevolent recipients getting physical with the text, is a motive more attractive than any mention of the hands of book producers.[81] Still, in the above-mentioned excerpt from *Eclogue* 6, just before the autonomous *pagina*, the reading the poem is hypothetically anticipated too, but in a rather incorporeal mode (Verg. *ecl.* 6,9–10): [...] *si quis tamen haec quoque, si quis / captus amore leget* [...]. Later, Propertius creates the image of a *pagina* that has sailed down from an unearthly place to be read in a detached way (Prop. 3,1,17–18: *sed quod pace legas, opus hoc de monte Sororum / detulit intacta pagina nostra via*).

Yet it is striking how Ovid, Horace and Propertius too, again and again address the haptic dimension of the reading process.[82] Mainly by staging touch as problematic, they cash out the tropes of *manus* by referring to Roman social realities from slave ownership to erotic dependencies. What is at stake here is primarily the author's dilemma of publication, compared by Ellen Oliensis with the "cutting of the umbilical cord":[83] in order to be received and known, a text must be handed over to reader(s),

79 Translated from Kammer 2006, 133.

80 Kammer 2006, 133, see also 159–161 on figurations of association and dissociation. Cf. Rico 2010, 169–170 on the hand's ambivalence: "La main joue ainsi tantôt sur une multifonctionnalité évidente qui fait d'elle l'outil préhensile par exellence, tantôt sur une capacité psycho-sensorielle."

81 One might also think of the very welcome, blessing hand-wiping of the Muses in Callimachus *Aet.* fr. 7,13–14, as discussed in Phillips 2013.

82 Varro seems to engage the motif too in Men. 304: *sed, o Petrulle, ne meum taxis librum / si te † pepigat haec modo † scenatilis.*

83 Oliensis 1995, 211.

both literally and figuratively. Horace engages the idea of the *potestas domini* in his epistle 1,20, imagining literary circulation as the flight (5: *fuge quo descendere gestis*) of a text-human hybrid, a book-slave (5: *non ita nutritus*; 13: *fugies*; *vinctus mitteris*) planning to slip from this author-master's control into the limelight.[84] In Horace's grim prophecy, the unhappy *manumissio* means that the reader's hands will take over the material text:

Vertumnum Ianumque, liber, spectare videris,
scilicet ut prostes Sosiorum pumice mundus.
Odisti clavis et grata sigilla pudico;
paucis ostendi gemis et communia laudas,
non ita nutritus. Fuge quo descendere gestis.
Non erit emisso reditus tibi. 'Quid miser egi?
Quid volui?' dices, ubi quid te laeserit et scis
in breve te cogi, cum plenus languet amator.
Quod si non odio peccantis desipit augur,
carus eris Romae donec te deserat aetas.
Contrectatus ubi manibus sordescere vulgi
coeperis, aut tineas pasces taciturnus inertis
aut fugies Uticam, aut vinctus mitteris Ilerdam.[85]

You seem, my book, to be looking wistfully toward Vertumnus and Janus, in order, forsooth, that you may go on sale, neatly polished with the pumice of the Sosii. You hate the keys and seals, so dear to the modest; you grieve at being shown to few, and praise a life in public, though I did not rear you thus. Off with you, down to where you itch to go. When you are once let out, there will be no coming back. "What, alas! have I done? What did I want?" you will say, when someone hurts you, and you find yourself packed into a corner, whenever your sated lover grows languid. But unless hatred of your error makes the prophet lose his cunning, you will be loved in Rome till your youth leave you; when you've been well thumbed by vulgar hands and begin to grow soiled, you will either in silence be food for vandal moths, or will run away to Utica, or be sent in bonds to Ilerda.[86]
(Hor. *epist*. 1,20,1–13)

As discussed above for the imagery of the author's touch, the reader's haptic impact is pictured as leaving traces too, intensively adding up with time (11): *contrectatus ubi manibus sordescere vulgi coeperis*. But while the author's invasion is thought to create additional, alternative value and meaning, Horace conceptualises a broader readership's (11: *vulgi*; 10: *Romae*) grip as hurtful (7: *quid te laeserit*; 8: *in breve te cogi*), polluting, as aging and degrading the book's attractiveness and worth (10: *carus eris*)—[87]

84 On Hor. *epist*. 1,20 see Oliensis 1995; Connor 1982; Dupont 2009, 153–155; Williams 2002, 152–154; Wulfram 2008, 90–93.

85 For the text of Horace in the following: Shackleton Bailey 2001.

86 For the translation of Horace in the following: Fairclough 1929.

87 Cf. Connor 1982, 147: "These hands, as *contrectatus* clearly states, do not caress with warm and joyful love; they violate and dishonour." and Dupont 2009, 154 "He will be passed from hand to

the next step will be nibbling moths destroying the papyrus, stealing its voice (12: *taciturnus*). What's more, the "bad touch" is also sexually and thereby morally charged, as in lines 7–8 the new reader is matched with a dominant lover who is only after quick satisfaction (8: *cum plenus languet amator*). However, *prostes* (2) can hint at the venality of the book which is inseparable from its material design (2: *Sosiorum pumice mundus*), shedding light on the procurer in the ostentatiously strict poet-master.[88]

Propertius, I suggest, makes use of the semantic field of *manus* in the sense of male authority over a female human being. In the elegiac world, this means *manus* without marriage, certainly, but all the more with passion. In elegy 2,34 the poet lover scolds his colleague Lynceus for having laid hands on his treasure (*curam*):

> *Lynceu, tune meam potuisti, perfide, curam*
> *tangere? Nonne tuae tum cecidere manus?*
> *Quid si non constans illa et tam certa fuisset?*
> *Posses in tanto viuere flagitio?*
> *Tu mihi vel ferro pectus vel perde veneno:*
> *a domina tantum te modo tolle mea!*
>
> Lynceus, treacherous friend, had you the heart to touch the girl I love? Did not your hands then fall powerless? It would be different had she not been so staunch and devoted or could live in such shame! Take away my life with sword or poison: only remove yourself from my mistress. (Prop. 2,34,9–14)

Who or what is it that has been touched illicitly? Unlike the other passages presented so far, the object here is, at least on the surface of the erotic narrative, not a text but the female protagonist (*domina*). However, having in mind the well-known metapoetic nature of Cynthia as both the *puella* and the *puella scripta*,[89] a twisted reference of *cura* to the material text is plausible and productive for further interpretation. If this elegiac mistress can be both a text and a woman, the scenario is not only about a lover defending the body of his mistress from his erotic rival's fumbling fingers.[90] There is at the same time the poet defending the *corpus* of his works against potential readers and writers, picturing the very limbs necessary to hold the papyrus roll slacking powerless (*tuae … cecidere manus*),[91] like refusing a sacrilege.

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hand (*contrectatus*) loved by all and sundry (*uulgi*); he will become ugly and dirty (*sordescere*) like a wretched vagrant."

88 On the prostitution theme in Augustan poetry see Fear 2000; on Hor. *epist*. 1,20 see Oliensis 1995, 216ff. and Williams 2002, 157ff.

89 See Wyke 2002, 46–77 and Fear 2000, 228–229.

90 Cf. Rimell 2006, 97 with fn. 16. See also Prop. 2,15,17–18: Cynthia's body can be pictured as body of text, with the author figure invading aggressively and joyful: *quod si pertendens animo vestita cubaris, / scissa veste meas experiere manus.*

91 A pendant in terms of writing could be *scribant de te alii* (Prop. 2,11,1), where the act of writing seems rather sexualised too, with a sort of phallic *calamus*/*stylus* hassling the Cynthia-Monobiblos.

Reception as a Material Challenge

Scenes like the one above, featuring morally and physically dirty hands,[92] stage the reception of the poetic text as unwelcome and burdened. While Horace has pictured popular reading (4: *communia*) as problematic (cf. Hor. *sat*. 1,4,71–72) opposing a more suited smaller audience (4: *paucis*) Propertius' author figure makes the experiencing of his poetry a highly intimate business and dreads even the impact of an inner circle of peers. At the same time, we find the Augustan poets claiming glory for their texts from the city to the whole empire, through time and space, with the history of transmission affirming their self-confidence up to the present.[93] Therefore, what I'm interested in is the oscillating valuation of touch in the examples under consideration, especially when the invading hand often has a strongly erotic connotation.

On the one side, the emphasis on the of the rival's grip and the quality of frustration of the slave-owner or lover is twisted with owner's pride.[94] In many other passages, the Propertian amatory poet balances constantly in between lamenting about his Cynthia going astray and advertising erotic pleasure/the pleasure of erotic poetry to his male friends.[95] In 2,34,25–26 he is rejoicing, soon after the passage quoted above: *Lynceus ipse meus seros insanit amores! / solum te nostros laetor adire deos*. The *ego* speaking in Horace's *epist*. 1,20, seems to have lost his scruples towards the end, [96] where he is preparing a verbose self-presentation to be delivered by the runaway, anticipating now the many ears of an anonymous (26: *forte* [...] *siquis te percontabitur*) and bigger crowd (19: *Cum tibi sol tepidus pluris admoverit auris*). These frictions can hint, tongue-in-cheek, at the author's pride in his irresistible books and his eager readership: if it is in a private circle or *tota urbe* with the new libraries and popular selling points (2: *Sosiorum*)—or even in *Utica or Illerda* (13)—they just can't keep their hands to themselves anymore.[97] The emphasis on the touching of the text always highlights a difference to oral performance and auditory reception, promising the reader a tangible, visible aesthetic experience that is private and repeatable at one's leisure, and all out of the author's reach. A potential recipient then, if male or female, might playfully enjoy the defamation (Prop. 2,34,9: *perfide*; Prop. 2,34,12: *posses in tanto vivere flagitio?*). What's more, the on-going act of reading is personalised and intensified as consuming and physically marking another's object of desire

92 See Springer 2010 on the cultural history of the complicated nexus "dirty hands—pure art".
93 E. g. Prop. 3,1,8 ff.; Prop. 3,2,17 ff.; Prop. 4,1,61 ff.; Hor. *carm*. 2,20; Hor. *carm*. 3,30; Ov. *trist*. 4,9,15 ff.; Ov. *am*. 3,15. On the ambivalent stance of the author figure, see Oliensis 1995, 212, 215–216.
94 On the poet as the lover see Oliensis 1995, 218 and Williams 2002, 157.
95 Cf. Fear 2000, 229: "For although the common knowledge of Cynthia's *nequitia* is distressing to the internal narrator, it clearly also corresponds to the popularity of the external poet's literary product."
96 Oliensis 1995, 221 and Wulfram 2008, 91 constate a more peaceful tone in the end of the poem.
97 Cf. the harassing *indignae manus* in Prop. 1,16,6, if the odd mediality of the door as a talking artefact of public interest is taken into account.

(Hor. *epist*. 1,20,8: *cum plenus languet amator*)[98]—without ever breaking moral boundaries on adultery and converse with slaves.

On the other side, the imaginary blending of harassing reader's hands on both human and textual bodies can play its part negotiating doubts concerning the publication of poetry in book rolls. This particular media form is, firstly, fragile in the sense of a material object and, secondly, fragile as a conceptual collection of many shorter texts. The vulnerability of the papyrus—to bookworms and moths, water, fire, etc. and, last but not least, to human touch—is without question, as Joseph Farrell illustrates:[99] "Because of the way in which they are handled, the outer part of the scroll is especially liable to damage of every kind. If it is not actually torn away, it is very likely to become soiled trough constant handling." In this context, the idea of stranger's hands taking over, holding, squeezing, rolling back and forward the *libelli*, maybe passing them on to others again, constantly risking the demolition and degradation of the material text, could be as disturbing as exciting. The profane recycling of papyri too seems to be a productive horror scenario for poets, as in Hor. *epist*. 2,1,269–270 (wrapping for spices etc.), Catull. 95,7–8 (wrapping for fish), and possibly Catull. 36,1 and 20 (toilet paper). Here we could look back at Propertius 3,23: in line 19, the mere prospect of a stranger writing (*scribit*) on it and relocating (*ponit*) the strangely literary *tabellae* makes the author figure wail in despair.[100]

As the Augustan authors, in Catullan tradition, like to merge the material appearance of the book roll tightly with the order and beauty of the words inscribed on it, the worries about the integrity of the papyrus are likely to concern the very poetic text too. Thereby, the poses of the lover poet, defending his erotic communication against mundane rationalities (Prop. 3,23) as well as the chastity of his *cura* against another man (Prop. 2,34) and the slave/book-owner (Hor. *epist*. 1,20) warning his property to change owners, work in a similar way. They both reflect possible forms of rivalry between authors and readers (who might themselves be authors). The recipient's physical invasion can also stand in for potential mental interaction with the text: for processes of interpretation and appropriation, for visible alterations like annotations, annulations or rearrangements made by another's hands that are not only holding but

98 See Williams 2002, 154: "Horace's jealous stance with regard to his young book is suggestive; and in any case, having bought and used Horace's *liber*, we readers know what it has to offer." Oliensis 1995, 224 links the satisfied reader figure in line 8 with the sphragis character of the poem resp. the external reader's fulfillment.

99 Farrell 2009, 167, investigating the special interest in the material weakness of written texts in Roman poetry of the first century BC. Cf. Dupont 2009, 154: "The book is a beautiful, fragile object whose beauty deserves a reading reduced to the minimum." See Birt 1882, 253–254, 364–365 on damage through reading; Winsbury 2009, 130–133 for an overview on possible threats. Cf. Hor. *carm*. 1,16,1–4 picturing a female reader drowning or burning the iambic poems.

100 It is notable that in the end of Prop. 3,23 the *puer*'s writing seems comparatively unproblematic. As suggested above, the uncanniness of dictation and copying can be a concern, but seemingly not in this sense of rivalry.

rewriting.[101] Thus, I argue that, in a more figurative way, the vision of the greedy man scribbling his *rationes* over sweet words in Prop. 3,23,19–20[102] and also the prophecy of the poetry book alienated as a school book in Hor. *epist*. 1,20,17–18[103] can picture non-poetic modes of handling the text, anxiously and normatively at once.

Turning finally to the appearances of very welcome, demure hands in Ovids *Tristia* and the *Heroides*, the setting is reminiscent of Catullus. In *trist*. 3,1, the personified *libellus*, supposedly exiled like his author-father, is pleading for acceptance in Rome. The reader's hands are addressed and asked to take the books "physically in hand, read them, and preserve them"[104] (cf. 2: *da placidam fesso, lector amice, manum*):[105]

> *Interea, quoniam statio mihi publica clausa est,*
> *priuato liceat delituisse loco.*
> *Vos quoque, si fas est, confusa pudore repulsae*
> *sumite plebeiae carmina nostra manus.*
>
> In the meanwhile, since a public resting-place is closed to me, may it be granted me to lie hidden in some private spot. You too, hands of the people, receive, if you may, our verses dismayed by the shame of their rejection.
> (Ov. *trist*. 3,1,79–82)

The Apostrophe, the hypothetical construction and, most notably, the staging of the poetry book as somehow dubious, potentially repulsive to touch (*si fas est*; *repulsae*) resonate with Catull. 14b,3 (*si qui forte*; *non horrebitis admovere*). By contrast with the examples from Horace and Propertius, the reader's hands (resp. the readers, with the already mentioned metonymy at work) are highly valued. With the specification *plebeiae … manus*, it seems that just the wider public, that the Horatian persona ostensibly contempted, is now desperately included, as an alternative to the establishment

101 Farrell 2009, 173 enlists possible threats beyond physical destruction for Catullus' poems: "the circulation of poems that Catullus himself would have decided not to make public; the circulation of Catullus's poems under someone else's name; or the circulation under Catullus's name of texts altered for the worse, expressly to embarrass him." Cf. Horace warning a poet not to touch i. e. not to plagiarize renowned works in Hor. *epist*. 1,3,15–17: *Quid mihi Celsus agit, monitus multumque monendus / privatas ut quaeret opes et tangere vitet / scripta, Palatinus quaecumque recepit Apollo.*

102 In the following lines 21–22, the anxiety of the poet's persona is pushed forward to the hyperbolic idea of turning upside down the economics of book publication, as the *poeta* would even pay to get his text back: *quas si mihi rettulerit, donabitur auro: / quis pro divitiis ligna retenta velit?* N. b. the on-going emphasis on the physical engagement with the material text (19: *ponit … rettulerit … retenta*). Roman 2006, 365 underlines the similar ephemerity in the self-presentation of the elegiac writing and the accountant's text production.

103 Cf. Oliensis 1995, 220: "In its 'old age', the book will no longer be understood as anything more than a collection of nonsense signifers of a certain limited educational use."

104 Newlands 1997, 73.

105 On *trist*. 3,1, see Newlands 1997 and Wulfram 2008, 362–367; for metapoetic and -media readings of *Tristia* 1 see also Mordine 2010 and Hinds 1985.

represented with the three state libraries of *bibliotheca Apollinis*, *porticus Octaviae* and *atrium Libertatis*.[106]

Epistle 20 presents a scene of mythic publication and reception performed by Aconthius, Cydippe and the famous apple inscribed with the words of a marriage promise:[107]

> *Verba licet repetas, quae demptus ab arbore fetus*
> *pertulit ad castas me iaciente manus.*
>
> You may recall the words which the fruit I plucked from the tree and threw to you brought to your chaste hands [...].
> (Ov. *epist*. 20,11–12)

Within the coincidence of the erotic and media constellation, the internal author has managed to seduce the chaste female protagonist/reader to lift up (*castas ... manus*) and read out his (*me iaciente*) powerful[108] words conveyed by the juicy text carrier (*verba ... pertulit*). The writing, as he teases her, could now be read again and again (*licet repetas*).

The physical reception of the material text—imagined as a playful trifle, penitent offer, or risky temptation—is made a challenge. In my view, this is a opportunity to narrate and anticipate the ambivalent value of small genre book poetry facing a public who is potentially more at ease reading historiographic epics, private letters or even *rationes* as depicted in Propertius 3,23. Despite insisting on their manifest authority and the doubts about a stranger's touch, the Augustan poets must have been entirely aware of the fact that they simply cannot do it without all the picking up and reading hands. As Carole Newlands notes on Ov. *trist*. 3,1, "the taking of the personified book *by* hand mirrors the crucial act of reception, of taking the book *in* hand and thus acknowledging its significance."[109] Ov. *epist*. 20 then, pictures a dominant and witty (internal) author, whose success absolutely depends whether or not his (internal) reader approvingly reaches out for the written words.[110] At the same time, the concerns about the contagious text and the praise of the chaste hands expose their deeply self-conscious character: to assign seductiveness to the poems is to make them more attractive. Just as with Aconthius' apple, the words might taste even sweeter when morally

106 On the state libraries and the question of their "public" character, see Dix 1994.

107 On *epist*. 20 see Nesholm 2009; Rosenmeyer 1996 and Lowrie 2009, 229–234.

108 See Lowrie 2009, 230 and Nesholm 2009, 56 on *epist*. 20 and 21: "In these letters, writing is not the representation of action, but the action itself."

109 Newlands 1997, 63, furthermore linking the absent hand of the book polisher with the preserving hand of the reader.

110 See Nesholm 2009, 58 and 59 on the importance of Cydippe's engagement, furthermore highlighting the precarious nature of the letter as another media of Aconthius' seduction on p. 58: "Each of his letters meets with potential failure as Cydippe nearly fails to read them." Like Rosenmeyer 1996, the argumentation mainly focuses on communication and mediality on the level of the erotic narrative.

dangerous—and just as Cydippe,[111] every reader of the concerned passages can feel the repeatable thrill of being trapped by the text in the moment of touching and seeing the verses. In addition, by humbly hoping for readers with benevolent, "clean" hands, there is always a normative, both media and social constellation created along a strict vision of who should operate the text and how. Interestingly enough, with the plebeians in Ov. *trist*. 3,1 and the young female in Ov. *epist*. 20, both our last examples envision readers of limited social status: the grip, the authority of the probably quite well respected male author must never entirely loosen.

5 Prospect: Full Contact Texts

Picturing again the physical dimensions of ancient writing and reading, hands were not necessarily the only body parts touching the material text. Elbows, knees and bosoms could have been involved too, bringing the papyrus in direct contact with the dressed or naked skin—not forgetting that the face could get close too.[112] As shown for the hand, these zones of the human body, and also bodily fluids like tears, blood or sweat, could be discussed with regard to their metaliterary, and in particular metamedial potential. To look at these further aspects of the motif with respect to the topic of authority and authenticity promises to extend the field of concern[113]—probably less consistently than when tracking the many roles of the touching hand, but rather intensively, as these kinds of physical interaction are likely to transgress boundaries of conventional poetic imagery, but also of medial realities, and of ideas about decency.

Passing over the quite well-known visions of writer's tears pouring down on texts,[114] blood makes a drastic liquid, as pictured in another epistle of the *Heroides* collection: In *epist*. 11, Canaces's *libellus* (!) gets fatally blurred (*oblitus … libellus*; cf. Prop. 4,3,3–4: *oblita; litura*):

Siqua tamen caecis errabunt scripta lituris,
oblitus a dominae caede libellus erit.
Dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum
et iacet in gremio charta soluta meo.

111 See Nesholm 2009, 57 and Rosenmeyer 1996, 13 on the physical domination of Cydippe trough text and author.

112 On the use of the chin see Birt 1907, 116–118. On the *sinus* see Birt 1907, 43, 118–119 and Helmut Krasser in this volume.

113 On the body and poetics in Augustan literature see Farrell 1999 (Ovid) and 2007 (Horace); Freeman 2014 (Horace); Milnor 2002 (Tibullus); Sutherland 2005 (Horace); Wyke 2002, 47–77 (Propertius) and 115–154 (Ovid).

114 On tears and blood in the *Heroides* see Farrell 1998, 335–336; cf. Rosenmeyer 1997, 33ff.

> If aught of what I write is yet blotted deep and escapes your eye, 'twill be because the little roll has been stained by its mistress' blood. My right hand holds the pen, a drawn blade the other holds, and the paper lies unrolled in my lap.
> (Ov. *epist*. 11,3–6)

Here, the external reader is not only invited but almost forced to imagine smelling warm, bright red marks on his or her book, signs of an intensive, lethal contact of writer and *charta*:[115] "Die Schrift suggeriert, sie sei authentisches Zeugnis verzweifelter Liebe, sie bewahre einen letzten Moment, über den sie zugleich hinausweist, indem sie imaginiert, was sie selbst sein wird: verwischt von Tränen, verschmiert von Blut." The two instruments, of writing (*calamum*) and of killing (*strictum … ferrum*), are equated through the two holding hands (*dextra tenet … tenet altera*). At the same time, the extremity of the scene discloses its fictional character and reminds the reader of the clean text that he or she is seeing and touching, which is most certainly not an autograph by a mythic heroine.[116] From the suggested angle, the reference to the bosom (*in gremio*) reveals extended meanings too, as it evokes an erotic dimension: the unrolled papyrus (*charta soluta*) is said to be touched by a most intimate body part and body opening, by the place of sexuality and creation[117]—just as it is, very likely, the case in the present medial "reality" of Roman readers with the book placed over the lap.[118]

For a last view on an imagination of physical contact somehow less existential, I turn to Horace's *Epistles* again. In a satirical depiction of book transport, Horace's persona forbids Vinnius Asina to carry the book rolls for Augustus in his armpit, thereby sweating on the poems:[119]

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115 Kiening 2008, 81 on Ov. *epist*. 7 and 11.

116 See Farrell 1998, 336: "The combination of the writer's apology for the state of the text with the complete legibility of the text we see thus raises the question of editorial activity." Rosenmeyer 1997, 34 too notes the challenging opposition of "physical reality" and of "poetic illusion".

117 Spentzou 2003, 156 draws a parallel between the text and a baby: "Canace's little 'book' sitting in her lap all stained by the blood of its mistress, like an embyro when coming out of the maternal womb." See also p. 156–158 including *epist*. 20.

118 *Epist*. 18,17–18, Leander to Hero, engages another everyday gesture in contact with texts, highlighting its private and exciting character. It describes how the female reader-figure eventually meets the letter with her lips and teeth, breaking the seal by biting it: "*Forsitan admotis etiam tangere labellis, / rumpere dum niveo vincula dente volet.*" For the narrated letter, which is again merged with the narrating poetry book (15: *haec scribens … dixi*), the act of reception is displayed as a disruptive but welcome and thrilling take-over. This distichon is directly embedded in more hand-scenes like v. 16: *iam tibi formosam porriget illa manum* and 18 ff.: *Talibus exiguo dictis mihi murmure verbis, / cetera cum charta dextra locuta mea est. / At quanto mallem, quam scriberet, illa nataret, / meque per adsuetas sedula ferret aquas!*

119 On *epist*. 1,13 see Wulfram 2008, 110 ff., discussing the historicity of the book sending and Connor 1982, 151 on the vividness of Horace's worries about his clumsy delivery man: "[…] Horace makes us feel more horrified at the actual occurrence than relieved it has not or will not happen."

Sic positum servabis onus, ne forte sub ala
fasciculum portes librorum, ut rusticus agnum,
[...]
neu vulgo narres te sudavisse ferendo
carmina, quae possint oculos aurisque morari
Caesaris. [...]

[...] you are to keep your burden so placed as not, for instance, to carry the little packet of books under your armpit, even as a bumpkin carries a lamb [...]. And mind you don't tell all the world that you have sweated in carrying verses that may win a hold on the eyes and ears of Caesar. (Hor. *epist*. 1,13,12–18)

While the physical engagement of the ideal intern recipient is anticipated as neat and explicitly head-based (*oculos aurisque ... Caesaris*), the illicit and soiling (cf. Hor. *sat*. 1,4,71–72: *libellos / quis manus insudet vulgi*) handling of the book rolls includes a body part known for its unpleasant excretion.[120] The man carrying the rolls is compared to a farmer dragging a sheep (*ut rusticus agnum*), as a matching of two incorporations of bad grooming. The literary imagination of reader's bodily involvement with poetry books is taken one step further again—but, as in the case of the touching hands, it is the strong reference to physical experience and the manifold cultural connotation that fuel the gripping media fantasy.

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120 Cf. Hor. *epod*. 12,5: *gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis*; Petr. 128: *Numquid alarum negligens sudor?*

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